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As I See It

Observations of a Civil Servant

WARNER W. STOCKBERGER

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As I See It

Observations of a Civil Servant

50 Essayettes of 150 Words

BY

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Warner W. Stockberger

Long ago he was a research worker with drug plants and a division chief in the Department of Agriculture. But his hobby was studying and improving human relationships among employees. Nowadays this is called personnel administration.

The hobby became his life work when he was appointed the Department's first Director of Personnel in 1925, shortly after the Classification Act was passed by Congress. He held this post until 1938. And because of his pioneering achievements, the Department became widely known as a leader in wise personnel administration.

These miniature essays are distilled from a rich experience in human relationships.

Each one of them is exactly one hundred and fifty words long—almost as brief as a Chinese poem. Each presents a different facet of a philosophy of work—particularly a philosophy of work for people in the Government service.

Doctor Stockberger took time to think. These little essays grew out of contemplation as well as experience. They reveal the man better than anything that could be said about him.

He never regarded employees in the Government as masses of people. They were always individuals.

The essays are the thoughts of an individual addressed to individuals about fundamental things that concern each of us.

APR 15 1943

Accident of Circumstance

THE ACCIDENT of circumstance is far more important than deliberate planning in shaping individual careers. Young people entering college often elect to specialize in a field which appears to offer excellent opportunities for employment and future advancement, only to find on graduation candidates for positions are far in excess of the demand, and find themselves doing other work for which they are not as well prepared. Or, two persons of equal ability and attainments obtain identical positions in the same organization, but in different divisions. In one, turnover in the higher positions may be rapid, thus affording opportunity for frequent promotions; in the other, it may be negligible, bringing little or no opportunity for advancement. Again, unforeseen events may bring prestige to one, leaving his equally capable colleague unknown. So the accident of circumstance plays its part, barring opportunity for one and opening to the other the pathway to success.

Allegiance to Position

Some kings have lost their heads because of the delusion that they and the State were one. Some lesser individuals vested with authority or responsibility in large degree also lose their heads, figuratively, when they arrogate to themselves personally the loyalty, deference, honor, and respect which is rightfully rendered to the position rather than to its occupant. Such persons apparently do not appreciate the fact that while individuals may come and go, the position with all its accessories and adjuncts continues on.

The distinction between a position and its occupant must be clearly understood by the rank and file of an organization if morale is to be maintained following a change in leadership. No charge of disloyalty can be sustained against those who faithfully serve the new leader. Obviously a change in leadership affords no justification for withholding or curtailing that continuing allegiance to which the leader's position is entitled.

An Obligation

All who stand in a supervisory relation to others must realize the important part each and every one plays in the effective utilization of our human resources. It is a matter of common knowledge that the personnel of every division or working group in an organization is very responsive to the attitude of the leader to whom they are responsible. The taking upon oneself of direct authority over other persons, therefore, carries with it a definite and binding obligation to use it wisely and judiciously. It implies an understanding of the causative factors of human behavior and of the methods of influencing it favorably; it implies the capacity to analyze the effect of different policies upon human beings in all their complex working relationships; and it implies the ability and purpose to be ever considerate of the interests of employees and zealous in their protection against arbitrary or unfair treatment.

Attitudes

ATTITUDE is a state of mind which may find expression in behavior or conduct. Environment, education, associates, and experiences, all exert a determining influence on the formation and nature of our attitudes. Since these factors vary with almost every individual, the attitude of each toward any given object or purpose differs correspondingly. The attitude of every person, as revealed through behavior or conduct, may become different with each change in relations or circumstances. Thus the attitude toward a superior may be respectful, deferential or obsequious, but arrogant, arbitrary or domineering toward subordinates; or overindulgent toward the familiar and accustomed, but skeptical and suspicious toward the new and strange.

Attitudes are not always logical, reasonable, justifiable or sensible. If inflexibly maintained they become obstacles to progress. Critical self analysis will often reveal faulty attitudes and their cause. They can be modified or changed, but only through the exercise of will power.

Better Speech

Keen observers have pointed out as a significant fact that many great business executives have command of unusually large vocabularies and that the clarity and precision of their diction arrests attention. Although the process of acquiring a comprehensive vocabulary does not forthwith transform a person into a great executive, it does develop the ability to present ideas forcefully and effectively.

In ordinary discourse the wearisome repetition of trite and hackneyed words and phrases suggests either mental inertia or lack of familiarity with acceptable forms of clear and precise expression. Also the profanity with which the conversation of some individuals is abundantly interlarded may have some justification as a means of emphasis or on the basis of a release for strong emotion. But all too frequently it is irrelevant or inappropriate and annoys and irritates the listener. Moreover it is a mechanism for concealing a deficient vocabulary or absence of serious thought.

Cacoethes Loquendi

"TALK IS CHEAP," declares an old adage. That there is much cheap talk may also be asserted. The propensity to talk overmuch materializes in an intemperance of words. "No one can be an orator sitting down," said a former Secretary of Agriculture, but neither sitting nor standing diminishes the flow of verbal utterances of the truly loquacious person.

In almost every group which meets for discussion there is one or more individuals who, if unrestrained, would monopolize the conversation. They are oblivious or indifferent to their want of courtesy toward the others present who also have something to say. Likewise, loquacity produces letters of triple the necessary length, voluminous reports shot through with irrelevant details, and long and verbose oral explanations which bemuse and weary the listener. The fine gold of intelligent conversation is alloyed with the dross of loquacity. The formula for its purification is: talk less; think more.

Capital

CAPITAL is usually thought of as wealth available for supplying the needs and desires of human existence. Its unequal distribution has resulted in a perennial series of economic and social problems. When idle, capital produces nothing and restricts the opportunity for workmen to obtain employment. Flagrant abuses of privilege and violation of human rights have attended the efforts of many individuals to amass wealth. The power and influence exerted through large aggregations of property have produced conditions which compel thousands of persons to forego all thought of acquiring wealth in excess of a modest competence. Yet in his brains and skill every individual has a form of capital which, judiciously employed, will yield gratifying results. Capital in this form is not taxable, is not lost in times of panic or depression, and is safe from impairment by active competition. However, unused brains and skill, like idle capital, yield no returns.

Conditioned Response

A YOUNG LAD attending a circus was attracted by a feature loudly advertised as an "Educated Pig." To enable the pig to display his "learning," short strips of cloth on which certain brief sentences had been painted were placed on the floor before him. In response to each of a series of questions put by the exhibitor, the pig would pick up and bring to his master the strip of cloth bearing the appropriate answer.

The procedure which results in conditioned response should not be confused with or mistaken for the educative process. True education is something other than a conditioned response or the mere accumulation of facts. It is an internal metamorphosis and development of an individual's mental behavior.

The alleged learning of the animal was only an automatic response, developed by long training, to recognitory cues disclosed by the form of the questions. The pig was still only a pig.

Conservatism

CONSERVATISM is a deep-seated human trait which becomes manifest as disinclination or opposition to any change in the existing order. It shrinks from the new and the strange, clings to well-established customs and procedures, and retards even when it does not prevent progress. It is not aware of, or ignores the necessity for change without which progress can not take place. Fear inspired by an impending change develops attitudes which simulate conservatism. Even at rumors of a change the imagination conjures up all sorts of dire possibilities which may result, but anticipation is usually fantastic when compared with realization.

Changes in an organization inevitably take place as a necessary part of its growth and development. Opportunities for recognition and advancement are far greater in progressively changing organizations than in those where ultra-conservatism constantly inhibits progress. Organizations must change to keep pace with social and economic advances and to avoid fossilization.

Counseling

"TROUBLE shared is trouble halved," is an old axiom. The extent of the practice of sharing troubles, of seeking counsel or advice in personal difficulties, is perhaps not generally realized. A recent survey disclosed that many persons in widely differing professions or callings are engaged in counseling. Among them are ministers, lecturers, psychologists, vocational counselors, writers, columnists, sectarian practitioners, physical therapists, numerologists, graphologists, spiritualists, and numerous others. The motives which impel people to seek advice probably vary as widely as the ability, sincerity and purpose of those who are consulted. Much of the advice given may be of doubtful value, nevertheless it is a response to a very real human need.

In every employed group there are always individuals with financial, educational or other personal problems who could be aided to resolve them if wise and sympathetic counsel were provided. Counseling can have an important place in effective personnel administration.

Curiosity

ALTHOUGH it is often alleged that curiosity killed the cat, the circumstances which precipitated the fatality are never revealed. It is implied, however, that undue inquisitiveness was exhibited without reasonable caution and prudence. But neither caution nor prudence can relieve from condemnation that curiosity which takes the form of prying into the private affairs of others. On the other hand, the lack of inquiring and laudable curiosity has here and there ruined the chances of persons for recognition and advancement. The lack of curiosity inclines to narrow-mindedness, acceptance of routine, circumscription of interest, and indifference to the ideas that engage the serious attention of others.

Intelligent curiosity arouses an eagerness for information and a desire to acquire useful knowledge. Purposefully directed it responds to the perennial challenge of new fields awaiting exploration. The natural result is a continued learning, sustained thinking, and the development of a versatile and open mind.

Democracy

EVERYBODY is talking about democracy these days, some to extol its virtues, others to predict its ultimate downfall. It is often thought of merely as a form of government, but it is more than a form of government. It is the embodiment of the right of every individual to share in the consideration of problems which relate to his welfare or destiny.

Too many persons today are concerned more for what democracy can do for them than for what they can do for democracy. Too many persons think only of the individual freedom guaranteed by democracy and disregard the social responsibilities they must bear to insure that freedom. Democracy is a way of life of a people. It concerns the responsibilities and duties of the government to the citizenry and the rights, duties and responsibilities of individuals in relation to their government and to the society in which they live.

Democratic Administration

ADMINISTRATION, conditioned by the form of the organization and following the line of least resistance, tends primarily to become autocratic; but it becomes democratic when it is motivated by supreme respect for human personalities and encourages employees to work jointly for the common good on a basis of critical justice and equality. In administration, the democratic way provides for freedom of individual expression and, through cooperative effort, seeks to gain voluntary compliance with those policies or procedures which majority opinion considers the most desirable.

Democratic administration, however, does not imply that equality of responsibility which inures to the citizenry by virtue of the ballot. Democratic administration cannot survive without authoritative leadership and without recognition of the right of the leader to exercise his authority. It is different from autocratic administration, not in the possession and *use* of authority, but in the *manner* and cooperative spirit in which it is used.

Discipline

No one is fully competent to enforce discipline upon others unless he has first learned the art of self-discipline or self-control. This implies not only control of emotional impulses but also the ability to consider impartially all the facts bearing upon the case. The effect of corrective measures does not cease with the person immediately concerned but is felt by the entire working group of which he is a member. If the discipline is considered too rigorous or not wholly merited, the group spirit sustains a shock, resentments are aroused and morale is impaired.

The literal application of the dictum "like penalties for like offenses" may readily lead to grave injustice. It is pertinent to inquire when offenses are "like" and on what basis likeness is determined. Offenses nominally or superficially alike may in reality differ so greatly that uniformity in the corrective measures applied would in effect be discriminatory.

Efficiency Ratings

By recognizing the need for efficiency ratings, the validity of the assumption that all employees are not equally efficient is admitted. It follows, therefore, that some will be rated high, others low. Employees are well aware that their associates differ in efficiency. If all were rated high, the really efficient would have just cause for dissatisfaction. But the less efficient, unconvinced that a low rating is deserved, often allege discrimination. The rating officer's lot is not a happy one.

Probably no efficiency rating system can be devised that will give results satisfactory to all who are rated by it. The attitude of some rating officers is liberal, that of others conservative. As a result ratings vary more widely than is justified. Mathematical adjustments of the ratings are deceptive since they merely conceal but do not correct basic discrepancies. Thorough preliminary training of the rating officers is the only practical solution.

Employee Organizations

THE FIRST union of federal employees met with disfavor in administrative circles, probably because of a fear of encroachment upon official prerogatives. The right of employees to organize, then questioned, has since been established by statute. Individuals who now use coercion to restrain their employees from participating in union activities are out of sympathy with modern tendencies in government. Employees who are dominated by self-interest or have undue concern for immediate personal benefit may lack either effective leadership or appreciation of their obligations to the government which they have undertaken to serve.

What was once needed and still would be salutary at the present time is a thorough exploration of employer-employee relationships and of their mutual responsibilities and advantages. The trend today is to break down such barriers as may exist between management and employee organizations and to recognize them as potential mechanisms for the more effective functioning of government.

Experience

THE ASSUMPTION that the value of experience is directly proportional to its duration or length is a fallacy. Experience of three, five or ten years in some line of work is, in itself, no guarantee of a corresponding increase in knowledge, skill or ability to do the work in hand. Indeed, long unvaried experience, particularly when the daily tasks are repetitive, is likely to be a liability rather than an asset. It tends to develop habits of thought and action which eventually become routines in which flexibility and adaptability undergo atrophy. Consequently the training of inexperienced persons in new kinds of work is less difficult than retraining those who have developed routines through experience.

Mere duration does not necessarily indicate successful experience, or the acquisition of new skills or an increase in the powers of perception and judgment. Experience must be appraised in terms of increased capacity to render service.

Friendship

FRIENDSHIP nurtures and develops the human spirit just as the glowing sun and the gentle rain of summer call forth the beauty and glory of leaf and flower. Joys and pleasures reach their fullest satisfaction only when shared with friends. Likewise when sorrows and troubles come, their burden is lessened by the sympathy and thoughtful ministrations of true friends. Wealth, power, fame or renown become as ashes of regret and disappointment if in attaining them friendships have been forfeited or sacrificed. All the material trappings of life may be swept away but unchanging friendship remains to console and sustain the spirit through the unfolding years.

Friendship deafens the ear to idle gossip or malicious rumor. It is self-giving rather than self-seeking and is bestowed without thought or expectation of a compensating return. It brings happiness to youth, contentment to maturity, solace to age. Time or absence but cement its bonds.

Gossip

When a drop of blood from the heart of the dragon Fafner fell upon the hand of Siegfried it burned like the cruellest fire. Likewise evil and malevolent words of gossip scorch and scarify the character and uprightness of the persons concerning whom they are spoken. Malign gossip is the spawn of a malicious and prurient mind. It sees evil where none exists and by implication and innuendo distorts harmless incidents into deviations from right.

Gossip is no respecter of persons. Neither young nor old, high nor low are immune to its insidious virus. Even the most circumspect shrink from the tongue of gossip as a beaten animal shrinks from the lash. The threat of gossip induces real and justifiable fear. In so far as a gossip is suspicious of the probity and motives of others just so far are the probity and motives of the gossip to be suspected.

Growth

"Capacity for growth," and "ability to grow," are descriptive phrases sometimes included in the list of personal attributes used in rating employee efficiency. Such phrases should be explained or amplified and the sense in which they are to be understood not left entirely to the imagination. Certainly they do not mean mere "increase in bulk," as growth was once defined by a prominent zoologist. Any fair appraisal of capacity must differentiate spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical growth according to the goal toward which growth is desired.

A grain of corn may have capacity for growth, but a germination test alone will prove that it exists. Also an employee's capacity for growth may remain latent for lack of opportunity to unfold. If an employee is expected to develop his capacity or ability to grow, it is an administrative responsibility to provide the adjuncts and stimuli necessary to initiate and promote growth.

Human Resources

THE ULTIMATE objective of personnel administration is the maximum utilization of our human resources. Constructive plans and methods are fundamental to a careful and provident management and conservation of these resources. Progressive and enlightened personnel administration is based upon a theory of mutual interest in the welfare of the organization and of mutual interdependence of both employer and employee. Human resources alone supply the material which vitalizes an organization. They may be increased, developed, or created. The government, which is not organized to make money but to spend money, lacks the cost-accounting yardstick that is used in industrial management to measure the value of an employee's services. An important personnel function, therefore, is to develop standards for evaluating the services of government employees and to devise and introduce such new and improved practices as will insure the highest type of public service and also maintain a correspondingly high employee morale.

In-Service Training

EFFECTIVE government must be responsive to the constantly occurring changes in economic and social conditions. Employees must have the opportunity to keep abreast of the progress of events which are related to the part they play in conducting the public business. Organized in-service training is a very promising means of increasing the ability of employees to meet the demands of government for a continuing growth in their competence. Although in-service training is nothing new in the government service, heretofore it has not been well organized.

Comprehensive programs of in-service training are now in the making. Ultimately the expenditure of necessary services and funds must be justified by the proponents of these programs. This will be difficult unless there has been (1) a critical, advance determination of the kind and quality of training that is most needed, (2) assurance that the training programs are educationally sound, and (3) a reliable method devised for evaluating the training.

Interest

INTEREST in the work one has to do may follow either of two directions. It may be centripetal, tending to focus sharply on a limited field; or it may be centrifugal, dispersing over a wide area. Centripetal interest, closely adhered to, leads to narrowness of mind and stifles curiosity about related fields of work. It induces indifference to opportunities for gaining information from all sources not immediately related to the subject of specific interest and eventually develops the type of individual styled "routineer."

Centrifugal interest normally leads to intellectual growth and broadness of vision since it includes exploration of the periphery of the subject as well as the center. It overlooks no opportunity for obtaining information however remote the source from the primary field of activity. Centrifugal interest counteracts the dangers of extreme specialization, develops wider perspectives and provides a more dependable background for sound and reliable judgments.

Introspection

"KNOW THYSELF," was urged by Socrates twenty-four centuries ago. He was an illustrious patron of the art of introspection or self-examination. Anyone can begin the practice of this art today, tomorrow. No preliminary courses of instruction are required. The only prerequisite is a sincere desire to understand and correctly evaluate the traits, attitudes and behavior which characterize the individual.

All too frequently failure to obtain desired recognition, promotion, preferment or social acceptance is ascribed to the prejudice, bias, discrimination, gross neglect of associates or official superiors or some other factor beyond the control of the individual. It is probable that the cause of the difficulties lies within himself. But he evades personal accountability for his failures and shifts the burden of responsibility to someone else.

Honest self-examination is likely to reveal certain inherent weaknesses which may be overcome by determined effort and so improve both mental attitude and human relationships.

Language

STICKING out the tongue, when done to express thought, is language. Oral and written words, signs, symbols, gestures and facial expressions are also means of communicating thought to others. No matter what medium is employed, imperfect transmission is likely to occur. Although words have the widest use, it is far from easy to select those which will give precise expression to thought. Even when found such words may not have the same meaning to different persons. In consequence a great deal of time and energy is often expended in fruitless argument or wordy battles which could be avoided by a preliminary definition of the terms to be used in the discussions.

When words are used as the vehicle for the conveyance of thought their effectiveness will be determined by the ability of the persons addressed to correctly interpret their meaning. A speaker who talks over the heads of his audience merely wastes his breath.

Loyalty

LOYALTY is a zealous devotion and faithfulness to country, to principle, to a superior, a person, or a group of persons. In all human relationships much importance is rightfully attached to loyalty. It is a test of friendship, of trustworthiness, of dependableness. Instilled in early youth, loyalty becomes an unconscious habit with maturity.

Since the human relationships of each person are many and diverse, each will necessarily have a correspondingly large number of different loyalties. In an organization there will be his loyalty to each superior and to each larger unit in the administrative line above him. Also there will be his loyalty to his community, school, church, societies, fellow workers, friends and family. To determine where, among all these, the deepest loyalty lies is a difficult problem. Extreme loyalty to one may easily result in some disloyalty to another. There is danger also of mistaking enthusiastic partisanship for loyalty.

Mental Activity

Some older persons have much more alert and active minds than others of equal age. They have the ability to recognize undesirable mental habits and the resolution to change them. Mental activity may merely go round and round in a circle, each revolution deepening the rut in which it travels, or it may follow a rising spiral of constantly increasing diameter.

There is cause for real concern if reflection discloses little or no change from year to year in the scope and character of one's reading and other mental diversions, or in his perspective of events both past and present. It is then advisable, periodically, to discard accustomed magazines for others entirely different in point of view; to choose books on subjects remote from those presented in the ones formerly read; and to give preference to those lectures, conferences, radio programs and movies that divert thought into previously unexplored fields.

Morale

MORALE is an attitude or state of mind which is reflected in behavior or conduct with respect to enthusiasm, confidence, courage, hope, loyalty, zeal and analogous feelings. Morale is fundamentally important in successful administration. To the able executive the maintenance of high morale becomes an actuality, not a pious sentiment. The importance of morale is recognized both by the football coach who inspires his team to maximum effort by appeals to their pride and sportsmanship, and by leaders of aggressor nations who insidiously endeavor to undermine the morale of a neighboring people preliminary to invading and subjugating them.

Low morale, in general, is either an index of the degree of supervisory ability, or a symptom of untoward circumstances affecting the situation in which individuals are placed. Morale may be suddenly vitiated by some shock or blow to the sensibilities or it may slowly crumble from lack of stimulation.

Opportunity for Advancement

Among the factors which affect the opportunity for advancement within an organization is the relative number of positions at each level of authority or responsibility. Since the number of positions at each level is usually inversely proportional to their importance, the organization may be likened to a pyramid in which the number of positions rapidly decreases as the apex is approached.

In an organization of, for example, one thousand employees, it would be rather absurd to hold out the hope that each one of them would ultimately attain a position at or near the top. Practically and mathematically that would be an impossibility. Then why not frankly admit the futility of encouraging a hope of continuous advancement for every individual? It would be much fairer to face the situation squarely and to endeavor to develop appreciation of other satisfactions which may be derived from the work when advancement seems no longer possible.

Organization Charts

A HUMAN skeleton is not a pleasing object to behold; it suggests but very imperfectly the tissues and sinews with which it was once clothed. Although its utility is obvious, no one would contend that it adequately depicts the living body.

Likewise, the organization chart is merely a skeleton or framework which gives form to the activities and relationships of a group of persons working together toward a common objective. It does not and cannot really portray that great complex of human abilities, attitudes, responsibilities, and inter-relationships that make a living, vital organization. An organization, like a living organism, is everchanging; if change ceases, atrophy and disintegration ensue. Just as the benzene ring of the chemist symbolizes his conception of the arrangement of atoms in the molecule, so the organization chart merely symbolizes a conception of group relationships. It can never be more than an imperfect pattern of transitory conditions.

Perspective

How often have we been told that seeing is believing! Yet our own eyes are often gay deceivers. From the top of the Washington Monument automobiles in the streets appear as overgrown toys. Or a friend distant from us by the width of an athletic field may appear to be half normal size. But no one is deceived as to the actual size of automobiles or friend. By an unconscious mental process we correct our visual perspective for the effect of distance on the apparent size of an object.

Mental perspective also deceives at times unless allowance is made for distortion. A dime held close to the eye will obscure the sun. An individual's own line of work may loom so large in his mind's eye that he can see little importance or value in the work of others. But the application of reason and logic can correct his perspective.

Point of View

Some persons may regard another's task as a dull, depressing routine, lacking in interest and personal satisfactions. Similarly, they may feel or express commiseration for people who are isolated from the amenities and convenience of urban life or whose supply of material goods by comparison appears insufficient to satisfy the desires of normal living. Year after year, however, many persons find interest and enjoyment in purely repetitive tasks, and despite the limitations usually imposed by rural life there are few who would exchange it for the tyranny of things and affairs of the city.

Who among us is wise enough to say that another's occupation lacks attractiveness? A lens-grinder, a brick-layer, a farmer and a mountaineer basket-weaver doubtless find in their work a never-failing source of inspiration hidden from those without actual experience in these crafts. Not our own but the other fellow's point of view is of real importance.

Prestige

Persons who have won the respect, deference and approbation of their fellows, whose counsel is valued and whose advice is heeded, have acquired prestige. Perhaps without conscious recognition a desire for prestige is the driving force behind all efforts to excel or surpass others. But prestige is not attained merely by effort. The individual whose anxiety to gain prestige leads him to maintain an expensive automobile on a wheelbarrow income fools no one but himself.

Prestige develops entirely apart from and beyond the control of the individual. Brilliant work by an economist brings to him no prestige unless it becomes known to his colleagues and wins their commendation and approval. Publications and participation in conferences and meetings may acquaint others with his work. Their evaluation of its worth largely determines his future preferment and advancement. Prestige, therefore, derives from the esteem in which an individual is held by his associates.

Price of Preferment

MEN WHO RISE to positions of prominence and responsibility almost invariably have friends who are loyal and zealous and also enemies who are equally zealous in their hostility and antagonism. Having raised their heads above the dead level of mediocrity, they become targets for the barbed shafts of calumny and envy cast by the evily disposed among those who have been surpassed. Men in public life are particularly subject to these insidious attacks on their character and reputation, but there is no permanent escape even for those in comparative obscurity. Such is the price of honor and preferment.

All who may rise above any level of their fellow men must steel themselves against the pernicious chatter of malicious tongues. When firm in the belief that their motives and course of action would be upheld by impartial judges, they must refuse to be annoyed or disheartened by unmerited or disparaging criticism.

Promotions

An essential element in any well-rounded program of personnel administration is a sound promotion policy. The prospect of promotion stimulates earnest effort, assiduous application and intelligent preparation for the assumption of additional responsibilities. Promotions are a necessity in the growth and development of an organization. The constant intake of new personnel at the lower levels of compensation and responsibility is counter-balanced by a continual outgo at the higher levels of responsibility. There must be frequent advancement to successively higher and higher positions if gaps in the ranks are to be avoided and key positions acceptably filled.

Promotions are neither special favors nor rewards for time serving. They recognize increasing competence and demonstrated ability to undertake and successfully discharge greater responsibilities. In his own self-interest, therefore, every employee should be impelled to utilize to the fullest extent available educational facilities to amplify his knowledge and widen his outlook.

Public Opinion

THE INCULCATION of a high sense of personal responsibility to the public at large is an important part of public personnel administration. The attainment of each and every objective of an organization is conditioned, but to a varying extent, by public opinion. Public sentiment for or against an organization is often built up from a series of impressions derived from association with a very limited number of its representatives. The low estimation in which public employees are held by many persons may be due to the indiscreet or ill-considered action or attitude of a small minority, yet the entire service is condemned as unworthy or inefficient. Thus the lapses of a few from high standards of conduct and demeanor bring much unmerited discredit to many. This situation will change only when employees are convinced that it is their responsibility to become a constructive influence in developing and improving public relations.

Release of Human Energy

THE RELEASE of sustained and effective human energy and its diversion into channels of cooperative endeavor or productive work is one of the major objectives of organization. The agents of this release are psychological rather than material in nature. Thus fear, impending danger, or excitement engendered by a calamity or disaster, sometimes enables persons to perform almost superhuman feats of strength, but for very short intervals of time.

There are other agents of release of energy which awaken an orderly, enduring response that facilitates the progress of employees toward the fulfillment of their ambitions. Among these agents are loyalty and fidelity to the purpose of the organization; the aspiration to assume responsibility; pride of craftsmanship; craving for approbation or esteem of colleagues and associates; longing for admiration because of accomplishment; desire for prestige; and the urge, in times of national emergency or crisis, to render a maximum of needed service.

Respect for Work

THE ASSUMPTION that some kinds of work have greater virtue or are more worthy than others suggests an attitude of snobbish superiority or exclusiveness. The many different kinds of work required in a large and complicated organization are in principle equally meritorious. Employees who type manuscripts, file correspondence, or maintain records have no less opportunity in their own spheres for rendering creditable and praiseworthy service than those who manipulate the paraphernalia of the laboratory or engage in some specialized field activity. Unwarranted discrimination is often made between different kinds of service. Even social distinctions are sometimes based on diversity in character of work. Certainly, auditing an expense account is no less worthy than identifying fungi. And cataloging a book is no less deserving than efforts to get parity between industry and agriculture. Obviously all the different kinds of work needed in an organization are equally entitled to consideration and respect.

Sacred Cows

THE ANIMAL worship which is prevalent among certain peoples is abhorrent to the western mind; yet, in administration, there are objects of veneration that have attained the status of sacred cows. Among them are academic degrees, concerning which the president of Brown University recently said, "Degrees, as such, are only tinsel." They are symbols of learning and wisdom that do not reveal the extent to which the recipient of a degree is either learned or wise. Educational institutions vary widely in their relative standing, in their requirements of candidates for higher degrees, and in the quality and scope of the courses offered. Individuals who receive degrees are also unequal in capacity and ability. The degree itself, therefore, is not a hall-mark of uniform excellence and competency.

Votaries of the degree often are blind to the fact that there are men lacking this academic emblem who are distinguished for their attainments.

Sharp Practice

THERE are men who appear to regard themselves as discredited or lacking in administrative acumen if some of their recommendations fail of approval by an official superior. They attach greater importance to that approval than to the merit and soundness of their proposals. Deceived by a false measure of ability they are led to omit, conceal, or even misrepresent facts inimical to a favorable decision. Thus the interests of the organization are subordinated to the personal vanity or self-pride of the one who makes the recommendation.

Before reaching a decision the official superior is entitled to a full presentation of all the facts irrespective of their implication. He must not be misguided, by withholding pertinent information, into making decisions prejudicial to his responsibility. This is a sharp practice which springs from decadent loyalty and self-deceit. Such tactics are soon recognized and engender distrust of all proposals, both specious and authentic.

Short Circuits

SHORT CIRCUITING in administration, that is, going around or over the heads of line officers, greatly increases the difficulty of maintaining morale. This is one of the many pitfalls that frequently entrap the unwary or inexperienced person who has been suddenly elevated to an important managerial post in an organization. Short circuiting, although prompted by laudable intentions, on the one hand arouses resentment and on the other engenders a lack of respect for constituted authority. However, it may at times seem justified in cases of emergency, when similar directions or instructions are to be repeated at frequent intervals, or when satisfactory previous arrangements have been made with the intervening supervisor.

The reluctance of employees to go over the head of an immediate supervisor is well known. Many will endure in silence despite impaired morale, rather than seek redress from higher authority. Even non-electric short circuits impair the functioning of operating machinery.

A Spur to Effort

THE RELATIVELY few positions at the higher levels of authority and responsibility are a constant challenge to ambitious employees who are striving to develop their capabilities and to prepare themselves for advancement when opportunity offers. These opportunities often exceed the actual positions in number, especially when changes in personnel occur in rapid succession. The resulting vacancies are usually filled by selecting from lower grades those who are prepared to undertake heavier responsibilities.

In general, positions decrease in number in inverse proportion to the ability required to discharge the obligations which they impose. On the other hand, the difficulty of discovering qualified persons who can satisfactorily fill the higher places increases in proportion to the importance of the position. The knowledge that there are attainable goals of achievement is one of the strongest incentives to further effort, consciously directed toward preparation for an enlarged and more active field of service.

Supervision

SUPERVISION, an important element in administration, is often one of the weakest. From a mercenary point of view supervision is merely a means to secure the greatest possible output of effective work from employees within a given unit of time. From a more enlightened point of view supervision is leadership. It involves planning—to minimize the necessary oversight; organization—to facilitate and coordinate proper effort; instruction—to insure understanding of requisite processes and procedures; training—to develop skills and increase knowledge of methods; and direction—to guide conduct and behavior into right courses.

The hard-boiled supervisor who harshly berates his employees on the slightest provocation, who ignores their right to courteous and considerate treatment, and uses fear to drive them to their work, may honestly hold the erroneous opinion that his methods produce the most satisfactory results. But he is only burning incense on the altar of his own self-conceit.

The Standstill

THE PROBLEM of the unprogressive employee must be squarely faced and solved. In every department short search will disclose a few employees who for long periods of time have made little or no advance either in compensation or in responsibility of duties. Fellow workers have continuously progressed to higher brackets while they were left behind. Eventually they become discouraged, unhappy or disgruntled.

Why do these cases occur? Were these employees deficient in training, assigned out of their aptitude, or improperly supervised? Were they victims of the accident of circumstance? It may now be too late to rehabilitate such cases if of long standing, but what excuse can be offered for permitting them to develop in the future? Unfitness or incompetence can be detected in the probationary period and permanent appointment denied. In existing cases the supervisors concerned have an obligation to reappraise the employee's difficulties and if possible relieve them.

They Took It for Granted

ONCE a high official of the Department, to reward a deserving employee, assigned him to a responsible administrative position. The official assumed that the employee had administrative ability. But he did not. Mismanagement finally caused his discharge from the service, ruined his career.

A research chemist published his discovery of a previously unknown compound in a certain plant. Later, another chemist proved that the plant in question belonged to an entirely different genus. The first chemist had assumed, without first making sure, that his material was correctly identified.

An elevator operator voiced an opinion to a friend who expressed disagreement by saying "You're crazy." He was overheard by a person who started the groundless rumor that the operator was insane. Soon the occupants of an eight-story building were using the stairs because they feared the operator.

It is better to be certain than to take too much for granted.

Tolerance

TOLERANCE, one of the virtues of democracy, is closely related to several other virtues among which are forbearance, sympathy, understanding, reason, justice and freedom. He who is tolerant exercises forbearance when passing judgment upon the opinions or acts of others. His sympathetic understanding leads to recognition of the right of the private individual to follow his own convictions if he does not invade the rights of others or transgress established bounds. Reason governs his attitude towards religious or political beliefs different than his own. His sense of justice makes of him an ardent supporter of the cause of human freedom.

There is a sharp distinction between tolerance and a mere indifference. The one is positive, the other is negative. Tolerance affords protection for the exercise of the moral and spiritual elements in social behavior. Indifference manifests no concern for either.

Tradition

All of us are indebted to tradition from which we have derived much that we know and most of what we have learned. Tradition is the refined wisdom of the ages vitalized by the personal experiences of our forebears, transmitted from generation to generation. Ultimately there results a cultural pattern which molds our beliefs, customs, attitudes and behavior. A comparison of many cultural patterns will show similarity and also unlikeness. Dissimilarities arise from variations in the events or experiences out of which the cultural patterns were formed.

People today are not more intelligent than their ancestors. They do know more because they have added to the store of knowledge already acquired by those ancestors. Their progress is greatest when they avoid repeating the errors of their predecessors. We can pay at least a part of our debt to tradition by making sure it is not lost to the rising generation.

Uncivil Civil Servants

Civil servants may well ponder the lack of respect that many citizens have for the government service. Civil servants themselves have been largely responsible for this adverse public sentiment. Many years ago, it is said, employees in one of the Executive Departments were notified that they would not be paid unless they were at their desks at least one day each week. Since then observance of working hours has become the rule, but many citizens still do not receive the courteous and considerate service to which they are entitled.

Civil servants should realize their responsibilities to their employer, the public, for wherever they are, in the eyes of the public they represent the entire branch of the government of which they are a part. If the citizenry do not hold their services in high esteem, the cause as well as the remedy lies within the body of civil servants themselves.

Unity of Organizations

THE STRUCTURE of every organization, irrespective of its functions or objectives, is erected upon the primary assumption that a few will command and the many will obey. The localization of final authority and power at the top level of the structure determines its hierarchical form and establishes the organization as an autocracy in fact. The exercise of power within the ambit of the hierarchy is autocratic or democratic, despotic or benevolent according to the character of the high command.

All organizations, whatever their field of operation, have certain features in common. Each one is a group of human individuals banded together for the accomplishment of some definite purpose. The interplay of the various attitudes and abilities, hopes and fears, likes and dislikes of these individuals produces patterns of relationship which, like threads of distinctive color in a variegated fabric, run through the entire network of organizations in a social structure.

Voluntary Cooperation

VOLUNTARY cooperation means nothing to the dictator; he enforces involuntary compliance. Voluntary cooperation means much to the skilled administrator; he develops it by ethical methods. Cooperation means joint action, mutuality of interest. It implies participation as equals, willingness to compromise, readiness to make concessions for reciprocal advantage. Cooperation and compulsion are mutually exclusive and antagonistic. Compulsion suppresses freedom of expression, inhibits voluntary response, arouses hostility and secret opposition.

Enlightened methods of directing human effort are relegating compulsion to the limbo of the outmoded and obsolescent together with its consequent passive resistance, superficial compliance and grudging obedience. Patience and persuasion, rather than pugnacity and parade of power, are gaining wider recognition as more effective agents in promoting better individual morale, improved performance and greater esprit de corps. Cooperation, consistently practiced, enables an administrator to project his plans and policies throughout his entire organization and insure for them acceptance and loyal support.

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